

REMARKS

Favorable reconsideration of this application, as presently amended and in light of the following discussion, is respectfully requested.

Claims 1-18, 20, and 21 are currently pending. Claims 1-14, 17, 18, and 21 have been amended by the present amendment. The changes to the claims are supported by the originally filed specification and do not add new matter.

In the outstanding Office Action, Claims 15 and 20 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) as being anticipated by U.S. Patent No. 5,880,731 to Liles et al. (hereinafter “the ‘731 patent”); Claims 1-4 and 8-11 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 6,219,045 B1 to Leahy et al. (hereinafter “the ‘045 patent”) in view of U.S. Patent No. 5,682,469 to Linnett et al. (hereinafter “the ‘469 patent”); Claims 5-7, 12-14, and 18 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the ‘045 and ‘469 patents, further in view of Smith (“Adding 3D Visualization Capabilities to GIS”) (hereinafter “the Smith reference”); and Claims 16, 17, and 21 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over the ‘731 patent.

Amended Claim 1 is directed to a conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising: (1) enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into said shared virtual space; (2) imparting means for imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in the shared virtual space, the virtual mobile telephone being usable within the shared virtual space; (3) determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, *whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*; and (4) connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by the determination means. Claim 1 has been amended to

clarify that the determination means *determines whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*. The changes to the claims are supported by the originally filed specification and do not add new matter.²

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 1 is rendered moot by the present amendment to that claim.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 1, the Office Action asserts that the '045 patent discloses everything in Claim 1 with the exception of the imparting means, and relies on the '469 patent to remedy that deficiency.

The '045 patent is directed to a three-dimensional graphical, multi-user, interactive virtual world system in which a plurality of users can interact with each other through respective avatars that represent each of the users in the virtual space. However, as noted in the Office Action, the '045 patent fails to disclose imparting means for imparting a virtual mobile telephone to each avatar in the shared virtual space, as recited in amended Claim 1. Moreover, Applicants respectfully submit that the '045 patent fails to disclose *determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*, as recited in amended Claim 1.

The '469 patent is directed to a software development platform having a user interface that serves as the vehicle for the user to invoke applications and perform tasks. The user interface provides a personal character that serves as an animated guide to assist the user in using the computer. In addition, the '469 patent discloses that specialized objects or characters may be provided to perform specialized tasks. For example, the '469 patent discloses a cellular phone object that follows a user from room to room. However,

² See, e.g., Figures 6-8.

Applicants respectfully submit that the '469 patent fails to disclose *determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*, as recited in amended Claim 1. Rather, the '469 patent merely discloses a graphical user interface for operating a telephone, and does not contemplate determining whether a calling party originated a call from a telephone in a shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world.

Thus, no matter how the teachings of the '045 and '469 patents are combined, the combination does not teach or suggest *determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*, as recited in amended Claim 1. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 1 (and dependent Claims 2-4) patentably define over any proper combination of the '045 and '469 patents.

Claim 8 recites limitations analogous to the limitations recited in Claim 1. Moreover, Claim 8 has been amended in a manner analogous to the amendment to Claim 1. Accordingly, for the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 1, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 8 (and dependent Claims 9-11) is rendered moot by the present amendment to Claim 8.

Amended Claim 5 is directed to a conversation support system for supporting a plurality of users in having a virtual conversation in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising, *inter alia*: (1) enrolling means for enrolling an avatar of a logged-in user into the shared virtual space; (2) imparting means for imparting a virtual public telephone usable by any enrolled avatar to the shared virtual space at a predetermined

place; (3) determination means for determining, in response to a call to the virtual mobile telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, of from a telephone in the real world; and (4) connecting means for executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by the determination means.

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 5 (and dependent Claims 6 and 7) is rendered moot by the present amendment to Claim 5.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 5, the Office Action asserts that the '045 and '469 patents disclose everything in Claim 5 with the exception of a virtual public telephone, and relies on the Smith reference to remedy that deficiency.

The Smith reference is directed to a system for creating three-dimensional models of urban areas or other geographical features using VRML. In particular, the Smith reference discloses that trees are shown as green stars and "phone boxes" are shown as red squares. However, Applicants respectfully submit that the Smith reference fails to remedy the deficiencies of the '045 and '469 patents, as discussed above. In particular, the Smith reference fails to disclose determination means for determining, in response to a call to a virtual public telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world.

Thus, no matter how the teachings of the '045 patent, '469 patent, and the Smith reference are combined, the combination does not teach or suggest *determination means for determining, in response to a call to the virtual public telephone, whether a calling party originated the call from a telephone in the shared virtual space, from a telephone in another virtual space, or from a telephone in the real world*, as recited in amended Claim 5.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 5 (and dependent Claims 6

and 7) patentably define over any proper combination of the '045 patent, the '469 patent, and the Smith reference.

Amended Claims 12 and 18 recite limitations analogous to the limitations recited in Claim 5. Moreover, Claims 12 and 18 have been amended in a manner analogous to the amendment to Claim 5. Accordingly, for the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 5, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejections of Claim 12 (and dependent Claim 13) and Claim 18 are rendered moot by the present amendment to those claims.

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of the dependent Claim 14 is rendered moot by the present amendments to Claim 14 and Claim 12. Applicants note that Claim 14 has been amended to depend from Claim 12. Accordingly, for the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 12, Applicants respectfully submit that Claim 14 patentably defines over any proper combination of the '045 patent, the '469 patent, and the Smith reference.

Claim 15 is directed to a conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising: (1) receiving a request for sending a message from the avatar; (2) determining whether a destination of said message exists in the real world; and (3) executing connection processing in accordance with the determination made by the determining step.

Regarding the rejection of Claim 15 as anticipated by the '731 patent, the '731 patent is directed to a system in which avatars representing users in a graphical chat session are periodically animated to produce gestures that convey emotions, actions, or personality traits. As shown in Figure 12, the '731 patent discloses that a user may filter out and block messages received from other avatars outside a predefined "proximity radius". However, Applicants respectfully submit that the '731 patent fails to disclose the step of *determining whether a destination of a message exists in the real world*, as recited in Claim 15. Rather,

the '731 patent merely discloses filtering out messages received from other avatars existing in the virtual reality space who are not on a predetermined list. Accordingly, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection of Claim 15 as anticipated by the '731 patent.

Claim 20 recites limitations analogous to the limitations recited in Claim 15. Accordingly, for the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 15, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection of Claim 20 as anticipated by the '731 patent.

For the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 15, Applicants respectfully traverse the rejection of Claim 16, which depends from Claim 15.

Amended Claim 17 is directed to a conversation support method for supporting an activity of an avatar in a shared virtual space built and provided on a computer network, comprising: (1) receiving a request for sending a message from a telephone of a user in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world, *wherein the user is not logged into the shared virtual space*; (2) determining whether a destination of the message exists in the shared virtual space; and (3) if the determining step determines that the destination of the message exists in the shared virtual space, sending the message to said avatar. Claim 17 has been amended to clarify that the user in the real world is not logged into the shared virtual space. The changes to Claim 17 are supported by the originally filed specification and do not add new matter.³

Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 17 is rendered moot by the present amendment to that claim.

As discussed above, the '731 patent is directed to a system in which avatars representing users in a graphical chat session are periodically animated to produce gestures that convey emotions, actions, or personality traits. However, Applicants respectfully submit that the '731 patent fails to disclose *receiving a request for sending a message from a*

³ See, e.g., Figure 8 and the discussion in the specification related thereto.

telephone of a user in the real world through a public telephone network in the real world, wherein the user is not logged into the shared virtual space, as recited in amended Claim 17.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully submit that amended Claim 17 patentably defines over the '731 patent.

Amended Claim 21 recites limitations analogous to the limitations recited in Claim 17. Moreover, Claim 21 has been amended in a manner analogous to the amendment to Claim 17. Accordingly, for the reasons stated above for the patentability of Claim 17, Applicants respectfully submit that the rejection of Claim 21 is rendered moot by the present amendment to that claim.

Thus, it is respectfully submitted that independent Claims 1, 5, 8, 12, 15, 17, 18, 20, and 21 (and all associated dependent claims) patentably define over any proper combination of the '045 patent, the '469 patent, the '731 patent, and the Smith reference.

Consequently, in view of the present amendment and in light of the above discussion, the outstanding grounds for rejection are believed to have been overcome. The application as amended herewith is believed to be in condition for formal allowance. An early and favorable action to that effect is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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